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SUBJECT: REFUGEES IN RWANDA - A CHALLENGE FOR GOVERNMENT,
UNHCR

Classified By: DCM Cheryl Sim, reason 1.4 (B/D)

11. (SBU) Summary: The refugee operation in Rwanda is having difficulty keeping pace with the growth of the Congolese refugee population. In the past six-months, over 3000 Congolese have entered Rwanda, fleeing fighting in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Over 60 percent of the present population is made up of young people less than 18 years of age. The most pressing limitation in local capacity is land. Rwanda is grappling with land issues for returnees, and deportees from Tanzania and Uganda. Making land available for refugees is increasingly difficult. UNHCR and the American Refugee Committee (ARC) are working effectively with the Government of Rwanda (GoR) to alleviate the pressure from new arrivals. Despite a good working relationship, UNHCR has failed to transfer PEPFAR funds to ARC in a timely way. The resulting delays have caused a gap in PEPFAR service delivery in eastern Rwanda. Presently, UNHCR has met the minimal needs of the current population. End summary.

UNHCR-GoR Cooperation

12. (C) The level of cooperation with the GoR can be judged by three key questions: 1) firewood distribution in the camps, 2) GoR distribution of ID cards to the refugees. 3) The allocation of land for camp expansion. For the past three years, UNHCR has raised these issues with the GoR with little positive result. Firewood distribution is not sufficient for the needs of the present refugee population. Much of the fault lies with the way the GoR has administered the contractor assigned the distribution duties. As a result, refugees use their rations as a currency to buy firewood, often from the same contractor used by GoR. Refugee women and girls have been raped by local farmers while searching, illegally, for firewood.

13. (SBU) UNHCR Country Representative Annette Nyekan expects the GoR to issue ID cards by early 2008. The GoR permits refugees to access basic services outside of the camp on presentation of GoR issued ID cards. These services include HIV/AIDS medical and counseling services and referral services for serious medical conditions that can not be treated in the camps. As of this reporting, refugees in Rwanda do not have valid ID cards. In October 2006, the

government authorized the issuance of ID cards. UNHCR offered to finance the operation that would deliver the cards.

¶4. (SBU) UNHCR and the GoR are also working together to resolve land problems for refugee camps. According to UNHCR protection officers, the GoR is considering expanding camps in 2008-09, but is not planning to open new camps to accommodate newly arrived refugees.

UNHCR-ARC Cooperation

¶5. (SBU) With the arrival of Nyekan as the new Country Representative, the relationship with ARC seems to be stronger than was previously the case. The two teams meet frequently and exchange information. When faced with common obstacles, like the acquisition of lands for camp expansion, the organizations work in concert to approach the government.

¶6. (U) ARC fully met its obligations to rehabilitate and improve facilities at the camps under its supervision. New construction is underway to keep pace with the growth of the camps and the increased sanitation needs of the present refugee population.

¶7. (SBU) As of October 17, 2007, UNHCR had not released the PEPFAR funds allocated through the UN organization for ARC for FY 2007. Because of the delay in funding, ARC has been forced to use other funds to maintain the required level of PEPFAR services. This funding delay has placed a strain on the relationship between UNHCR and ARC.

ARC Operations Under the Present Grant and Future Planning

¶8. (U) The refugee population is growing in Rwanda. The DRC crisis is driving ethnic Tutsi refugees from DRC into Rwanda; some are passing through Uganda on their way to asylum. The rate of increase is not dramatic. However, the outcome of the North Kivu crisis will dictate how many more refugees flee into Rwanda and how many will feel safe to return home. All new arrivals are assigned to Nyabiheke camp, the only remaining open camp.

¶9. (U) On October 17, RefCoord and Embassy Poloff visited Nyabiheke camp. The facility is overcrowded and growing. In response to this, ARC reorganized the camp to make use of every available space. New shelters and sanitary facilities are going up to accommodate the new arrivals. On the day of RefCoord's visit, the year long UNHCR effort to acquire new land for the camp bore fruit, and the GoR gave the okay for ARC to clear and build on adjacent farm land.

¶10. (U) ARC is building new shelters and preparing new land in a systematic and effective manner. Shelters are planned in quarters, or neighborhoods along with the services and sanitary facilities that will serve the new residents. Locations are mapped, and the distance between new shelters and health facilities, water and other stationary facilities are measured to ensure SPHERE standards are met.

¶11. (SBU) The new land acquisitions may be the source of new conflict. The camp is built largely on land too rocky for farming. The newly acquired land is fertile farm land that has been under cultivation for decades. Local farmers, already annoyed by refugee firewood incursions into the nearby forest, may react badly to the camp expansion at their expense.

Reception of Deportees from Uganda

¶12. (SBU) On October 15 and 16, RefCoord met with officers of UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP), and the Rwandan Red

Cross to discuss the deportation of 2000 Rwandans from Uganda to Rwanda. All interlocutors described the efficiency and speed of the deportation/reintegration operation. The picture that emerges is of a bilateral Uganda-Rwandan operation, funded by World Bank funds, and executed in record time.

¶13. (C) Rwanda used funds allocated by the World Bank for the demobilization of armed groups to fund the logistical requirements of the operation. Rwandan diplomats in Kampala worked out the details with Ugandan officials based on discussions that took place on the margins of the Rwanda-Uganda-UNHCR tripartite meeting held in Kampala. Shortly before launching the operation, the GoR informed UNHCR in Kigali of their plans. Uganda informed UNHCR-Uganda at the same time.

¶14. (SBU) Both UNHCR offices agreed to monitor the deportation operation for humanitarian purposes only, and to ensure there were no persons of concern included in the deportation. UNHCR-Rwanda recommended that the GoR notify the donors and other IOs should they require assistance. The operation was launched on October 4, and the GoR notified the Rwandan Red Cross and WFP on that same day.

¶15. (U) The Rwandan authorities moved the deportees to the Rutgamo transit center, where they were quickly identified, and assigned transportation to communities of origin, or to centers for reintegration. Within 48 hours, all of the deportees had left the transit center. When the Rwandan Red Cross arrived at the center to conduct a needs assessment, they found it deserted.

Burundian Refugees Eager for Resettlement

¶16. (U) On 16 October, RefCoord accompanied by embassy Poloff visited Kigembe refugee camp. The camp population is Burundian refugees who have arrived in Rwanda in the last

five years, or who have been transferred from other camps. UNHCR and the GoR are the partners in the camp with very little NGO participation.

¶17. (U) During the camp visit, UNHCR staff divided the camp leadership into interest groups so that they could speak with visiting donors. RefCoord went to hear from the youth group, while the Poloff sat down with the refugee leadership council. In both meetings the refugees spoke of the need for resettlement in a third country as the only possible durable solution. In the youth group, the young people, some of whom were born and raised in the camps system, dismissed as false any notion that security in Burundi had improved. Interestingly, the refugees all recited the claim that their claims of persecution in Burundi were individual, and they should be considered by third countries on a "case by case basis." Among the youth group, this was the only English phrase that many of the men and women could utter. No matter what subject the donors raised, each group returned to the subject of resettlement.

¶18. (SBU) Camp environmental health and healthcare services appeared to be up to SPHERE standards. However, some basic services and supplies were not provided as required. The distribution of firewood was irregular and insufficient for refugee needs. As a result, refugees traded their food ration to buy firewood, or they left the camp and foraged in local forests.

¶19. (SBU) The GoR camp staff had not distributed personal hygiene supplies, provided by UNHCR, to health workers or to women in the camp. In general, the camp appeared to suffer from an over all lack of planning and supervision. UNHCR Country Representative said she would ensure that her staff were more assertive in overseeing camp services and activities.

¶20. (SBU) Comment: ARC is working effectively in the camps and has a good relationship with the GoR. The ability of the operation to absorb new refugees is limited by land availability. Rwanda might be hesitant to make large swaths of land available to UNHCR for refugees while it deals with immediate and intractable problems of resettling returnees and deportees who continue to arrive from Tanzanian and Uganda.

¶21. (SBU) The issuance of identity documents to Rwanda refugees has been a matter of discussion between the GoR and UNHCR for the past three years. Without valid documents, refugees can not legally move outside of the camps in daylight hours, urban refugees can not access services at local health centers or schools. Protection officers and police have no means of determining the status of aliens in the country. UNHCR told RefCoord that the issue would be solved by December 2007. RefCoord suggested that the organization inform donors of the present situation to seek assistance with the GoR. End comment.

¶22. (C) Recommendation: PRM should continue to support ARC in its operation in Rwanda to support Congolese refugees. UNHCR's failure to release PEPFAR monies to ARC caused a break in service provision to PEPFAR customers. The UNHCR pass was devised to lighten the workload of the PEPFAR country team in Kigali. Presently, PEPFAR has restructured to allow for an increase in the staff for the relevant countries. It would seem wise to end the practice of passing funds through UNHCR immediately, and resume passing the funds to ARC through the PEPFAR country team.

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